

## **“TO BE OR NOT TO BE”: THE PLIGHT OF FEMALE EDUCATIONAL LEADERS IN MASVINGO PROVINCE, ZIMBABWE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

This paper investigates the experiences of female educational leaders /managers (School Heads, principals and Directors) in the Masvingo Province of Zimbabwe. It attempts to establish why the number of women school heads and college principals, remains relatively low, compared to that of men. It uses the descriptive survey method which is appropriate due to its characteristics that are described by Cohen and Manion (1991) and Robson (1993). The literature review shows that efforts continue to be made internationally and nationally, to correct the gender imbalances that have characterised the educational management arena for many decades. Information about capabilities of women as administrators and managers is unearthed and made known. This paper challenges myths about women and portrays a rational image of women. It argues that female educational managers are promoted on merit and can face up to the challenges of leadership, just like (if not better than) their male counterparts. Policy positions are interrogated and the effectiveness of policy implementation is also critically examined. The sample consists of: 1 state university, 1 private university, 1 poly technical college and 102 schools under various responsible authorities.

### **Introduction**

Culturally, a Zimbabwean black woman, whether she is educated or illiterate, is responsible for her family and the development of the home. Her place is in the kitchen and she submits to her husband's will/ wishes. Traditionally, women are not listened to. Instead, they listen to their spouses and do as they are told. Men justify their dominance over women, using the famous rib-

verse, Genesis 2:21 and 22 “And the Lord God caused deep sleep on Adam ... and He took one of his ribs... Then the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, He made into a woman ...” Even the traditional position during sexual intercourse, enhances the subjugation of women. The paper was inspired by the fact that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, there was a paradigm shift which increased acceptance levels of women leaders. Unfortunately it is an uphill task for women to get promoted and the promoted women (educational managers) continue to be subjected to critical public scrutiny. The paper examines the indicators of efficiency and effectiveness of women leaders and compares them to men.

This paper recognizes gender activists have made progress towards emancipation of women. With the advent of the Beijing Conference, Child-line: Gender Affirmative Policy; Zimbabwe Women Lawyers Association (ZWLA); Musasa Project and The Ministry of Women’s Affairs , the scenario is poised to change in favour of Women. The drive from most sectors was aimed at removing obstacles that denied equity and equality to women.

### **Key Terms**

Gender; Culture; Stereotype; Equality; Equity; Affirmative Action; Abuse; Discrimination.

### **Objectives Of The Study.**

- To determine the influence of culture on gender –based discrimination.
- To establish the number of women in positions of leadership, in proportion to population figures of Zimbabwe.
- To assess the effectiveness of implementation of gender affirmative policies in the educational management sector. Gaps between legislative changes and practice need to be identified.
- To protect female leaders from all forms of abuse at home and at the work-place.
- T advocate for continuous education of the population in general through formal and informal channels, the media and political party gatherings in order to remove obstacles to sharing of opportunities and power by men and women.

### **Review Of Related Literature**

In the early 1970s, efforts to end discrimination against women and to ensure their equal participation in society provided the impetus for most initiatives taken at levels like the International Women's Year and the World Conference held at Mexico City in 1975. Such efforts were motivated by the realization that women's reproductive and productive roles were closely linked to the political, economic, social, cultural, legal, educational and religious factors that hindered the advancement of women. It had become an open secret that the economic exploitation, marginalisation and oppression of women stemmed from chronic inequalities and exploitative conditions at family, community, national and international levels. The general assembly, in its resolution 3520 proclaimed the years 1976- 1985 to be the United Nations Decade For Women. The major themes identified for action were Equality Development and Peace. The sub themes were Employment, Health and Education.

### **The Traditional Perspective**

Coote and Campbell (1988) quote Spender as picking on the year 1975 to be the turning point in bringing a new relationship between men and women. Prescription of roles is sociological and so it can be combated. About this, Murdock in Haralambos and Holborn (199:528) says "Man, with his superior physical strength can better undertake strenuous tasks such as lumbering, land clearing and constructing houses". This paper takes the position that leadership is not a manual and physically-demanding function and leadership positions are not necessarily effectively filled up by masculine figures. In addition to the famous rib verse men argue that their superiority over women is God- given as evidenced by Genesis 3;16 in which the Lord said to the women," .... in pain you shall bring forth children, your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you". The fact of the matter is that the men who exploit women choose to ignore the same Bible which informs them to be "servant leaders just like Jesus Christ. There is no psychological basis for regarding the household and family as essentially the domain of women, nor for the devaluation of domestic work; regarding the capacities of women as inferior to those men. But the societal belief that such a basis exists perpetuates inequality and serves as a barrier to the attitudinal changes necessary for the elimination of inequality. Swati and Shiela (1995) say husbands feel depressed when their wives become successful. They want wives not Chief Executive Officers, Vice Chancellors or Principals to live with.

Pregnancy and childbirth make women stay at home while their male counterparts are advancing on the echelons of the organisational hierarchy. In Sweden, according to Asplund (1988) women were not allowed to pursue professions of their choice. University education was only made open to them in the 1870s. MacRae (1991) found that British women were only granted the right to remain in fulltime jobs after falling pregnant, in 1988. The number of women in part-time jobs rose because women chose to spend more time at home, nursing their babies. In the Republic of South Africa, women lost their jobs when they fell pregnant. Lessing (1994) says the legislation was revised in women's favour in 1991. Zimbabwe was not different from the examples cited above so far. Professional women were not entitled to maternity leave before Zimbabwe attained its independence in 1980. Families preferred to send boys to school and girls were groomed for marriage even if they were illiterate.

The World Plan Of Action came up with strategies for the advancement of women during the period from 1986 – 2000. Among these were the Universal declaration of Human Rights; the International Covenant on Civil and Political rights, the international Covenant of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights; The Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Discrimination against Women. All these reaffirm the international concern regarding the status of women. More important still, they provide a framework for renewed commitment by the international community to the advancement of women and the elimination of gender based discrimination. Such concerns motivated this study and made us pay particular attention to the international development strategy for the third United Nations development decade which stresses the need for integration of women in which the development process.

Education is a pivotal aspect of the development process and this is why this paper took a keen interest in women who were leaders/ managers of educational institutions. Posts of headship/ principal were regarded as a preserve for men. Subsequently, women did not find an equal footing with men in most societies. They were rated second to men, minors and perpetually condemned.

## **CULTURAL INFLUENCE**

Culture is to a large extent responsible for perpetuating the position of women as inferior to that of man. Boys grow up expecting care from women (wife, lover, secretary) because of the care they get from their mothers and sisters (Fifth and West, 1991). They also observe that girls internalise the role of caring by being mothers and siblings helpers from a tender age. Asplund (1991) says some men are reluctant to bring women into managerial positions due to societal attitudes against women. Promotion of a woman to the position of organisational leader would not go without being associated with some immoral behaviour. Mentoring of the women and going on business trips with male colleagues would immediately be described as unfeminine. Even the promoted woman's spouse, as pointed out by Swati and Sheila (1995) just did not appreciate the promotion. This study insists that sex role(s) stereotyping should be minimised, if not totally eliminated because it hinders the professional growth of women.

## **EQUALITY AND EQUITY IN POST COLONIAL ZIMBABWE**

The government of Zimbabwe resolved to correct the gender imbalances by enacting a gender policy under the auspices of the Ministry of youth gender and employment affairs. Some religious groups (e.g. Johannes Masowe's followers) are still opposed to the idea of sending the girl child to school. For purposes of equity and equality, sending a girl child to school is just as imperative as sending the boy child. This paper argues that if girls are denied access to education then there will always be fewer female educational managers. Magada in Byrne (1992) found that in poor communities the majority of school drop outs were girls. No wonder why the ministry of education, sport and culture (1986) implemented the gender equity in education project (GEEP) whose terms of reference were to create an enabling environment for the girls and women to participate in education.

Between 14 and 17 years of age, girls dropped out of school due to early pregnancies (1992 census records Zimbabwe). The decline of female learners got worse with age compared to their male counterparts. According to the Ministry of Education and Culture (1994) there were only 29% female learners at advanced level, 34% at technical college and only 26% at University. Despite the supportive programmes and policies to promote equity in Zimbabwe the 'double

burden' for women cannot be ignored. Women were found to have the major responsibility for domestic tasks and of participating in the Labour force. These studies admit that the participation of women in development activities is increasing but their benefits are not increasing proportionately.

### **Feminist Paradigm**

According to Mackinnon (1991:37) the feminist theory is critical of gender as a determinant of opportunities, considering that women suffer from the distinction of sex(es). Compared to men, women lack control over their social destinies. Feminism sees women as a group and seeks to define and pursue women's interests. The 1948 United Nations Declaration of Human Rights made women feel that they need to afford themselves a socio-economic status equal to that of men. This led to the rise of feminist theories like liberal feminism. McDowell and Pringle (1992) say liberal feminism stresses equality of women and men is achievable within the legal and economic framework and the country.

The economic meltdown has negatively affected the pursuance of new programmes in support of women and also derailed those that were already underway. The deterioration of the economy gave rise to new problems. In the education sector, there is still need to break down the occupational barriers and taboos by allowing women to participate in the fields of employment that were previously regarded as male preserves. This paper noted that some of the blame was attributed to the school curriculum for forcing girls to study Food and Nutrition; Fashion and Fabrics, while boys study Metal work, Woodwork and Technical Graphics. The instructional processes used curricular designs that confined girls to certain professions. It was only in the last decade (2000 – 2010) that some schools effectively implemented recommendations of the Nziramasanga Commission, and gave learners the freedom to choose the vocational- technical subjects of their interest.

This paper propounds that a change in attitudes and beliefs can correct gender imbalances. Women in leadership positions face a lot of challenges and have to struggle to be accepted and or recognized as leaders. Attitudinal problems need to be aggressively combined.

## **Abuse of Women**

Micheal Rubenstein (1978) says in the USA, the term sexual harassment was used while in the Netherlands, it was called sexual molestation and in France, it was “Sexual Blackmail.” There are two terms of sexual harassment.

- i) *Quid pro quo* – something for something e.g. sexual favor for promotion
- ii) Hostile working environment. Sexual harassment does not happen in the workplace only but also in the wider community. This is because the workplace does not exist in a vacuum. Many victims of sexual harassment are single women, divorcees and widows. This paper found that even the married women fell victim to sexual abuse from their bosses and their colleagues. Abuse of women negatively affects performance and study found that there is legislation to punish the perpetrators but the victims are not compensated.

Khan (1980) studied the normal health of women, their work out-put concerning their professional development. He found that out of 528 women of various professional fields aged between 22 and 60 years, 40% had been sexually harassed at work. The 30%, who said they had never been sexually harassed, later revealed that they had experienced gender harassment. This study recognized that the emotional turmoil that the women went through, negatively affected their effectiveness at work.

Studies by Mahlase (1997) and Griffin (1995) expose various forms of harassment of women leaders by their supervisors/top management. These include sexual harassment and unfair labour practices for those who refused to avail themselves to top management’s sexual fulfilment. All these brought serious psychological effects and marred work out-put. The predicament of women is the essence of this paper, i.e. Women educational managers suffer in many ways to attain and retain their positions. One can rightfully assume that a lot of cases of sexual harassment went unreported because the victims were embarrassed, afraid of victimization and also try to protect their marriages. Studies conducted in Britain by Neuberger (1991) also revealed serious unfair practices which resulted from sex discrimination.

The cited examples and others, explain why there are still few female school heads at secondary school and institutions of higher learning. Zimbabwe (2013) had only two female vice chancellors out of a total of 15 Universities. Statistics show that there are more female teachers than males and yet fewer women rise to positions of educational managers. This is what motivated this study. The momentum of feminist activism needs to be continuously rekindled.

### **Marital Status of Participants**

Marital Status	Number	Percentage
Married	52	47.2
Single	18	16.4
Divorced	20	18.2
Widowed	20	18.2
Total	110	100

The overwhelming 47.2% married respondents implied that the institution of marriage was not a barring factor on women advancement. The single and widowed school-heads pointed at a trend that needs further study. At tertiary institutions, there were still very few women leaders, but their marital status could not be confirmed.

In as far as qualifications were concerned; women were academically and professionally as strong as their counterparts. The majority (73%) of educational managers had a Bachelor of Education (BED) degree and 17% had acquired a Master of Education degree. The female educational managers were found to have at least ten years' experience and so they were mature enough to be in charge of institutions.

Participants were asked to indicate their designations in the schools' grading ranks as shown in the Table below

### **Women Leaders, According to school Size**

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Head, Grade 3	36	34
Head, Grade 2	42	40
Deputy Head 1	23	22
Head 1	4	4
Totals	105	100

For this section, schools had to be separated from colleges and universities due to the difference(s) in criteria used for grading them. Schools with enrolment figure of 500 pupils and below are Grade 3 and most of them are located in remote, rural areas. Schools with enrolments of 501 – 900 pupils are the Grade 2, while those with learner enrolments of 901 and above, were the grade 1 schools found in urban high density residential areas. Such schools utilized double sessions/hot-seating for instructional processes.

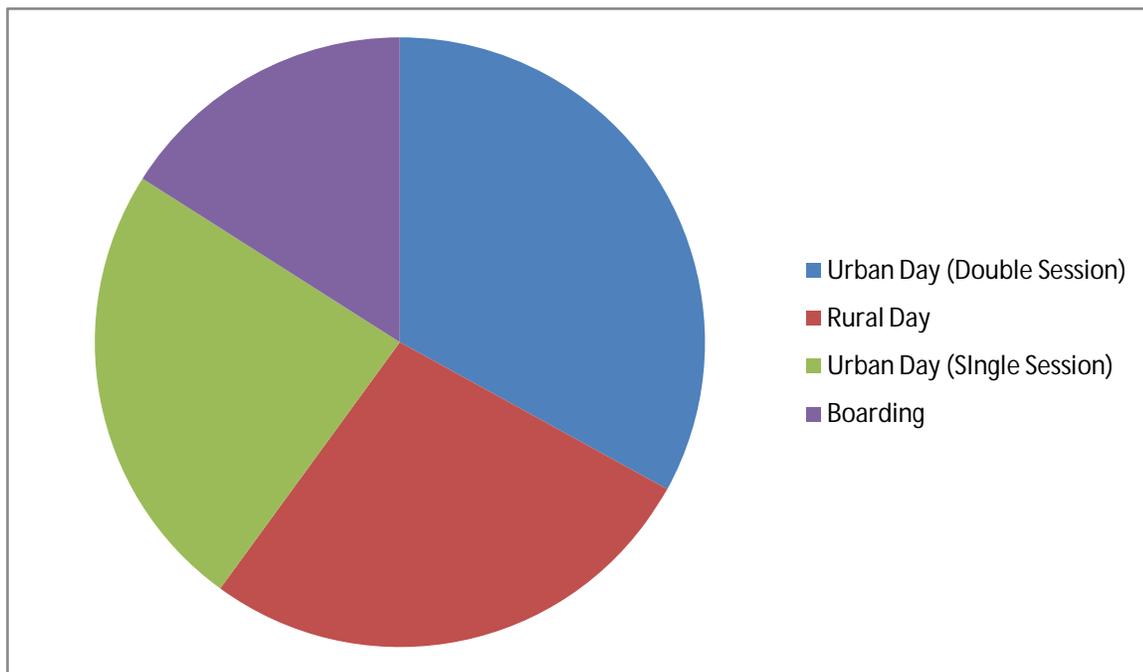
### **Women Leaders in Institutions of Tertiary and Higher Education**

<b>Designation</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Vice Chancellor	0	0
College Principal	1	20
Dean	1	20
Chairperson	3	60
Director	0	0
Totals	5	100

The percentages showed that given a chance, women were capable and effective educational managers. The presence of women managers was an indicator of the implementation of Ministerial policies and also the fact that women earned their positions. No sympathy for women was required because, they could compete with men. All they needed were equal opportunities.

## TYPES OF SCHOOLS

This paper sought to establish the nature of work environment that the participants had to make do with, from the types of schools that they were in charge of. The pie –chart that follows, has the details.

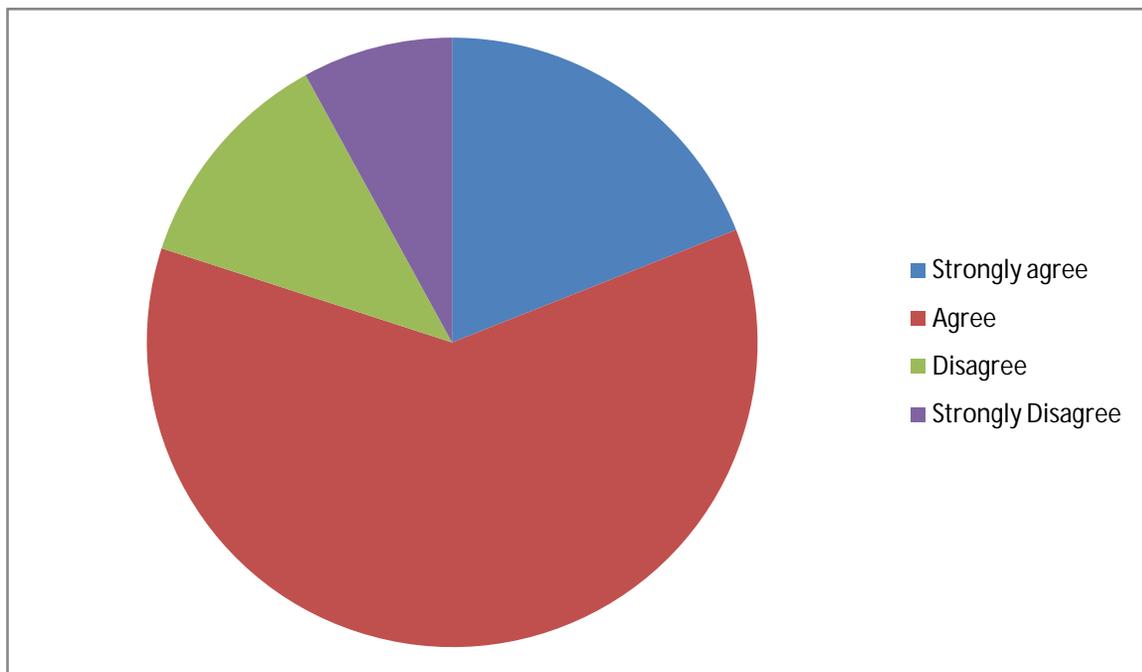


27% of the participants were in charge of rural day schools that served poor communities which did not attach much value to education. These women were determined to successfully prove their worth, with the hope of being promoted to head a bigger, better resourced school. Urban day, single session schools were mostly former whites only or private schools. They had ideal facilities, as shown by their profiles. For 24% of the participants to be found heading such school, it signified that at least some educational managers were not stressed by poorly resourced institutions. However, the 33% who headed the government – run institutions, were strong characters who managed to get work done where there were infrastructural inadequacies, high teacher-pupil ratios and no material resources. Even the 16% of females who took charge of

boarding schools, did their best but the percentage implied that women either shunned boarding schools or they were denied the opportunity to head them.

Attitudinal Problems / Gender Stereo typing

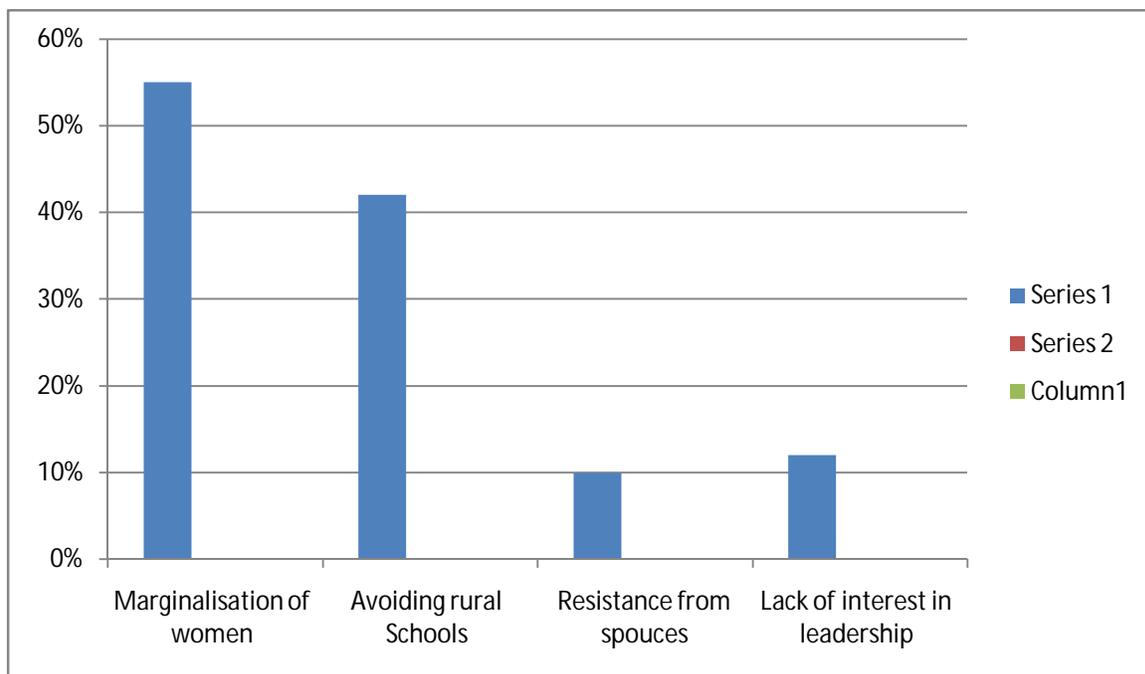
### **Females Shun Headship**



A total of 80% said it was true that women dislike venturing into managerial positions. I linked this with Swati and Sheila (1995) who point out those men got depressed by the success of their wives at work. So the participants found it was not quite feminine to vie for leadership positions and this was the possible reason for having fewer women heads than men. Closely linked to the position taken by participants is the fact that traditionally, an African woman is expected to look after her in-laws. Added responsibilities would disturb her service delivery at home as she would have to spend most of her time away (at work). The whole family would not encourage their daughter-in-law to take up a post of promotion in the rural areas. On the other hand, their male counterparts were free to go and work anywhere.

Participants dispelled the idea that male subordinates did not respect female bosses. This could be due to the fact women are naturally hard working and more organized. Their up- bringing instils a sense of duty and unwavering responsibility from tender stages. Of interest was the finding that female leaders usually had problems with female subordinates. One would think this was a result of sheer jealousy or cultural values which saw female heads as deviating/rebelling against feminine norms. Most participants felt that the Affirmative Action Policy demeaned them as it assumed that women had to be “favoured” since they were less capable.

### Major reasons for having Fewer Female Institutional Heads



Responses on the bar graph confirmed the marginalization of the girl child. They further drew attention to the significance of the Affirmative Action Policy. Life was very difficult in rural areas due to poor road networks, lack of health facilities, sources of water and lack of electrification. Women avoided rural schools because they would make their “mother- work” more difficult. Responses to the question on abuse from men at work, were as follows:- 27%

agreed that they had love affairs / extra marital affairs at work; 75% said they were abused for refusing to be intimate with top management and 35% said they had never been abused.

### **Conclusion(s) and Recommendations**

The various questions prompted me to note that communities were no longer ignoring Article 6 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which states, “Everyone has the right to recognition everywhere as a person.” (UNICEF 1998) The Ministry of Education Sports and Culture made strides towards encouraging female qualified and eligible officers to apply for posts of promotion. Society accepted the rise of women to management posts but the majority of ladies argued that they did not need the Affirmative Action Policy. All they wanted was the elimination of gender discrimination from birth to death. This would enable them to fairly compete with their male counterparts. Generally the female leaders agreed that they faced challenges at work but they were not frustrated at all. They found ways to cope with the challenges. Sadly, some marriages had broken up due to the animosity, jealousy and accusations that characterized the relationships in which women were promoted to head schools, colleges or universities. Their spouses could not stomach it, and were convinced that such promotions were in appreciation of sexual favours granted to top management. Finally, the study recommended that:

- Ministry of Education, Sport and Culture revise its pre-requisites for promotion and advocates for upgrading schools in rural areas.
- Women be allowed to contest openly for posts instead of getting preferential treatment as this made their male counterparts despise them.
- Material and financial support be given to rural District councils in their endeavour to provide education to communities.
- Decentralization to the extent that the school head exercises more authority over subordinates who do not comply with rules and regulations.
- Continuous education o gender issues to ensure that efforts to remove discrimination against the girl child do not inadvertently lead to discrimination against the boy child. Further research could be conducted.

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